

REVIEWS

THE STATE AND SOCIETY

A Hundred Years of English Government. By K. B. Smellie, Lecturer in Public Administration at the London School of Economics. Pp. 450, with Appendices. London, Duckworth, 1937.

The rapid growth in Great Britain during the last hundred years in the functions discharged by the state in society is, of course, one of the commonplaces of the social sciences. Dr. Smellie in his book in the Hundred Years Series analyses and explains the process. What he has to say will be equally valuable to the student of constitutional history, economic history, political science, public administration, or constitutional law. It is the most significant contribution to the subject since Dicey published in 1905 his book on *The Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the 19th Century*.

Dr. Smellie's treatment of the subject is at once more comprehensive and more difficult than Dicey's, which has gained much of its reputation from the simplicity of its theme and the lucidity of its exposition. In broad outline Dr. Smellie, like Dicey, recognises the difference between the era of "Benthamite individualism" and the era of "collectivism." But his analysis of the factors which produced the changes, and, for that matter, of the changes themselves, is at once more complex, more detailed and more realistic than Dicey's.

The arrangement of Dr. Smellie's book might, perhaps, have been made more clear by some direct explanation in an introduction or preface. What he does, however, is to divide the century since 1832 into three main phases, ending in 1870, 1914, and 1936 respectively. The period of the Great War is treated as an interregnum. No reason is expressly assigned for the choice of 1870 as the boundary, but the choice seems satisfactory. Within each of the three periods, Dr. Smellie gives successive chapters to the State and Society, to Government and Parties, and to the Machinery of Administration. He sets out to explain in each period the prevalent general ideas as to the proper functions to be performed by the state in the life of society; the dominant forces in politics, and the main features of the political struggle, so far as it relates to those functions and their exercise; and the methods and machinery by which these functions were exercised.

The author is clever and critical, and his own point of view is as definitely that of the social democrat as Dicey's was that of the Whig. But the book is not an essay in the polemical; it is well documented, replete with apt and scholarly quotations, and has a high degree of objectivity. Unfortunately, it shows signs of great haste. The lack of an introduction to explain the general scheme has already been mentioned. The proof-reading has been inefficient. The receiver has also felt as a drawback the absence of any explicit attempt to sum up in brief generalization the discrimination of each

successive period. This does not at all mean that the book lacks generalizations or is ill-arranged; indeed, quite the contrary. But it does lack something in finish.

Dr. Smellie shows that the progressive enlargement of the sphere of the state has been due not to the successive changes in the franchise (these, indeed, have been symptoms rather than causes), but to the changing requirements of the economic order in an industrialized island society, and to the growth of science in the modern world. In his treatment, the changing political theories as to the proper limits of state action appear as following, not anticipating, economic developments.

In 1832, the dominant upper middle class did share a more or less unified political theory—political and economic individualism, based on the teachings of the Utilitarians and of the classical economists. But, in fact, nobody was ever a complete and unqualified believer in *laissez faire*. The state was even then expected to exercise a far-reaching control—as by maintaining the ordinary law of property, contract, tort and crime, by taking positive action to create the conditions under which the individual could operate in freedom, (e.g., by the Companies Acts, and the Trade Union law), and by taking positive action to secure certain essential services which the market by common acknowledgement could not secure.

The next hundred years, however, disclose no equally coherent political theory to take the place of individualism. Traces, indeed, of the *laissez faire* attitude still endure, and no fully-thought-out doctrine of state planning has been put forward or espoused. Dr. Smellie remarks (p. 335) that:

“to many, we seem to be wandering between the two worlds, the one not dead but senile, the other monstrous but not still-born. There is a mighty maze, and still without a plan.”

What has happened has been an immense extension of the two kinds of state action in the economic sphere permitted by the utilitarians, under influences political, social and economic. In particular, the old economic basis of Britain's industrial supremacy was disappearing in the face of technological changes and the rise of industrialism in the United States and Europe. The psychological forces of nationalism demanded political action to retain a *status quo* threatened by economic changes abroad. The enfranchisement of the wage-earner gradually produced political demands for state action to organize the labour market, raise the standard of living, and provide increased social services.

These fundamental changes in the economic order and in the franchise naturally produced correlative changes in political organization and in administrative structure. These are traced in great detail. One of Dr. Smellie's most interesting remarks is that the period of 1918-36 is characterized by the substitution of the spirit of the professional for the spirit of the amateur. What he is referring to is the relative decline of debate in politics, and the relative rise of research as a technique of government.

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